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PREVIEW OF THE WOMEN IN AFRICA TO THE YEAR 2000 RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

1. One of the major papers to be presented to the Third Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development/Regional Intergovernmental Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women is entitled, "Women in Africa to the Year 2000." The basic idea behind the study is that as the end of the United Nations Decade for Women approaches, much remains to be done to ameliorate the situation of women in Africa. Innovative solutions and forward-looking strategies must be devised. It is towards these ends that this study is being undertaken.

2. The purpose of this short paper on the "Women in Africa to the Year 2000" project is to present the theoretical and methodological framework in which the study is being undertaken, in order to give a clear picture of the assumptions underlying the work. It is hoped that its presentation will have an impact on the policies regarding the integration of women in development in Africa for the rest of the century and beyond, and influence as well thoughtful reconsideration of the situation of women in other regions.

Theoretical Framework

3. Some of the weaknesses in past approaches to analyzing the situation of women have come from isolating women as an analytic category. Such an approach leads to the assumption that the situation of all women, regardless of class, country of origin, environmental situation, etc. is the same or similar. The fallacies of such an analysis are obvious. Therefore, there is an analytic need to "de-isolate" women's issues and to see them as a consequence of interrelated variables:

4. Thus a starting point of this study is a realization of the heterogeneity of women's situations - the realization that women in Soweto, in Kigali, nomadic Turkana women, women in Lagos live and behave in different ways and face different problems. Some women are endowed with resources, information and power, while others struggle for survival in marginal, urban suburbs or in poor rural or isolated drought regions. This last category of disadvantaged urban and rural women represents, unfortunately, the majority of African women. To recognize differences in women's problems means to recognize the need of different types of solutions to face these problems. There is thus no "package solution" possible for the problems facing women in Africa. Planners and policy makers need to handle concrete causal factors at precise decision points to orient development strategies towards desired goals.

5. The situation of women in Africa can not be isolated from the general development of the region. Women are an integral part of the historical processes that have affected the region -- that is, their "integration" is already a fact of life. As the Executive Secretary of ECA has written, the type of development which has emerged in Africa:

> .... puts us into a straight jacket of producing what we do not consume and of consuming what we do not produce; and, which makes us exporters of raw materials at low and, in most cases, declining prices in order to import semi-finished and finished products at high and rising prices.1/

1/ Adebayo Adedeji, the Evolution of the Monrovia Strategy and the Lagos Plan of Action: A Regional Approach to Economic Decolonisation (Economic Commission for Africa: 1983).

6. Thus, the need arises to study the situation of women in Africa, past, present and future -- from the viewpoint of scientific knowledge, utilizing new and fresh approaches. These new approaches should consider women's issues as concrete and specific, inextricably linked to the situation of their countries and the region, the economic and social systems and timeframe of which they are a part. The assessment of women's situation in Africa and the conception of the future must refer to concrete conditions and facts and should adopt a holistic perspective, moving through different levels of analysis and considering the multiple diminsions of the problem.

7. This study has been designed to be complementary to the ECA study, "ECA and African Development, 1983 - 2008", which was prepared for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of ECA. Its follows the same outline and utilizes similar methodology, as explained in paragraphs 12, 13, 17 and 18 below.

Categories of Analysis

8. As has been stated above, in this study it is necessary to examine the multiple dimensions of women's lives and the multiplicity of settings in which they are found. Thus, the study will begin with descriptive data on the following aspects of the present situation of women in Africa. Basic to any understanding of the situation of women in the region is a description of their demographic situation -- how many, where, what ages. This will be followed by an examination of women's positions in the socio-economic systems of the region. Since they are concentrated in the rural areas, the agricultuural sector will be examined in detail, looking at the access of women to basic inputs, their working conditions in rural wage and self-employment, major constraints to their agricultural productivity, additional roles they assume in the rural setting, and an analysis of the major problems they face there.

9. Presentation will be made of the processes of their coming to the urban areas - rural to urban migration, the marginality in which they find themselves in the cities, and the work they take on there. The realm of work will include industrial employment, self-employment, un- and underemployment. Their multiple urban roles will be examined and the major constraints they face in the urban setting proferred.

10. Vital to an understanding of women's situation, rural and urban, is access to water, and their nutrition and general health. Thus, an examination of environmental factors is also important.

11. Without the framework of social organization, political institutions and the law, one cannot view the entirety of women's situation. It is within this context that the achievement of equality, peace and security, the aims of the United Nations Decade for Women, must be seen.

12. The first part of the study which presents the current situation of women in Africa will be followed by the historical scenario describing how women's

participation came to be as it is within the socio-economic system that has evolved. This will be followed by the normative scenario, describing the possibilities of women's self-reliant participation in a system, such as that described by the Monrovia Strategy.

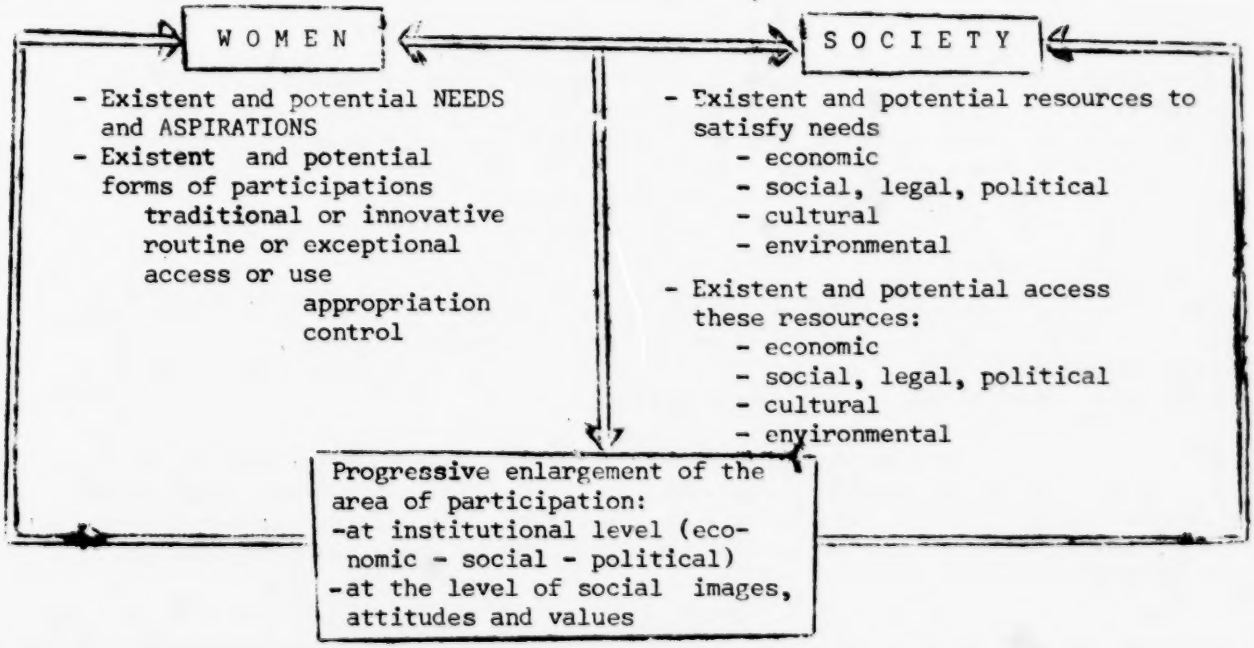
13. To imagine the future means to liberate women themselves and public opinion from fatalistic approaches - there is nothing that can be done - to possibilities, information, and know-how. The future can and should be different. But how? In what way? If ideal ways are conceived, what actions and strategies should be adopted to attain the desired goals? Answers to these questions will be set forth in the concluding part of the study.

Methodological Considerations

14. In order to handle the multiple variables and consider them in their dynamic interactions, diverse research tools are necessary. Some of these tools allow for the projection into the future.

15. One approach involves the devising of a model that can capture the major elements that affect women's situation and the interplay between them. The major element in this model are the women of the region themselves, as agents of change, and the societies of w hi ch they are part. Vital to development is the capacity of women in Africa to overcome constraints which they face and to define and implement a form of participation beneficial for themselves and for the region as a whole. In this they come face to face with society and its capacity to integrate positively and benefit from women as vital human resources in the development process.

16. The following tentative model has been suggested to capture some of the facets of the interplay between women's participation and societal transformations. This model will be refined and adapted, as necessary, in contact with empirical data.



17. The above model will be used in conjunction with the development of scenarios for specific sectors of women's lives and the socio-economic framework of which they are part. The future situation of women in Africa will depend to a large extent on the capacity of the system to integrate human resources, particularly women, more effectively and more positively into the development efforts of their respective countries. This is a wide objective which can be accomplished through many development strategies. The selection and assessment of alternative strategies requires a major analytic effort to conceive the consequences of strategies which are adopted or proposed. The process by which these consequences are envisaged consists of building "outlines or sketches" of the possible situation, using tools called "scenarios", that is, outlines of conceivable states of affairs given certain assumptions. The advantage of a scenarios approach to studying the future is that it can describe interrelations among facts instead of providing a one-dimensional view. It is particularly important for planning purposes since it allowsthe planner to imagine which factors and what type of relationships among them are affecting the action in question, and at which point actions can be oriented towards expressed goals.

The Need for Plans

18. To imagine alternatives for the future is not enough. It is necessary to devise and adopt a plan in order to orient the present towards what is seen as a better future. For this reason, this exercise in developing "forward-looking strategies" is not an empty intellectual one, but rather the most vital concern for women of the Region. Images of the future can be effective only if they lead to the making of policy. Women who see a better future must become involved in decision and policy making. Strategies must be devised to indicate how the imperfect present can become a better future.

19. The examination of what constitutes a better future has already taken place in the Africa region. The Monrovia Strategy for the Economic Development of Africa (Lagos, 1979) intends to implement a long-term strategy aiming at a self-sustained development and economic growth based on principles of collective self-reliance and aimed at improving the living standards of the mass of African people and reducing mass unemployment. Within this global strategy, involving and unifying the continent's different aspirations and strategies for a better future, African women are to play a decisive role, as detailed in the Lagos Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy.

20. ECA has increasingly recognized the great potential of women in Africa to accelerate the pace of national and regional development in Africa. As stated in the Lagos Plan of Action "since Africa's greatest asset is its human resources, full mobilization and effective utilization of the labour force (men, women and youth, both trained and untrained) for national development and social progress should be a major instrument of development".

21. It is hoped that this study may serve as the basis for serious discussion of the possible futures available to women in the Region. As amended and adopted by the Conference, this study, along with the volume "ECA and African Development", could provide important guidelines for regional and national planning over the next decades.